

City of Chicago's Department on Aging, Illinois

The overall goal of the Chicago Department on Aging's fitness and wellness programs is to empower seniors to take control of their own health and to assist them in making healthy lifestyle choices.

The Chicago Department on Aging has been providing Health Promotion Services for over 16 years through its Wellness Program. The goal of the Wellness Program is to foster positive health choices through individual consultations, health education and screenings. The program offers a three tiered approach to wellness through the services of a dietician, pharmacist and nurse practitioner who are available at six Chicago Department on Aging Regional Centers. Since January 2005, the Chicago Department on Aging has assisted more than 1,100 seniors in its Wellness Program and, what's more impressive is that all Wellness Program services are free to Chicago residents 60 years and older.

While all professionals in the Wellness Program are qualified to address a senior's nutritional concerns, the dietitian is most directly involved in education and individual consultations. Registered dietitians host monthly presentations which address many of the dietary concerns of older adults. Issues relating to diet and nutrition are frequently overlooked by seniors and their physicians, and often contribute to major health and chronic disease factors. The Chicago Department on Aging presentations offer easy to understand topics with practical approaches on how seniors can make simple changes to their diet, which will have a direct and positive impact on their health. Some of the most recent nutrition topics include: *Heart Healthy Ways to Jazz Up Your Diet*; *Water: The Forgotten Nutrient*; and *Can Food Affect Your Sleep?*

A recent addition to the Wellness Program is a twelve-week weight loss support group at several Regional Centers. The program offers a simple weight loss plan that is based on well-balanced nutritional principles, along with education on the importance of a regular exercise program. The overall goal is to help seniors adopt a diet that is safe, balanced and nutritionally sound as they attempt to loose weight.

Finally, and most important, registered dietitians are available for individual consultations once a month. During these sessions, seniors are free to seek assistance with any of their nutrition questions or even get help with designing their own individual meal plan.

In 1995, The Chicago Department on Aging launched its Chicago Fitness Plus Program as an aggressive counter to the acceptance by many seniors that a decline in functional ability and physical health are unavoidable consequences of aging. The overall program goal is the maintenance of a physically active lifestyle, in order to optimize one's functional capacity and ability to perform daily activities. In order to achieve this goal, the following impact objectives were established:

- Enhance enjoyment and participation in a variety of physical activities
- Develop and enhance the skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy needed to establish and maintain an active lifestyle
- Ensure the affordability and accessibility of the program

The Chicago Fitness Plus Program is modeled after the landmark Tufts University research that documents the positive benefits of physical activity for older adults, by incorporating strength training, cardiovascular exercise, flexibility, and balance training into the programming. Chicago Fitness Plus (CFP), administered by Alliance Rehab, Inc., is open to Chicago residents 60 years of age and older, and seeks to attract seniors who may not currently participate in an exercise program, and consequently stand to gain the most from participation. Over the past ten years the program has evolved to become the number one program offered through the CDoA serving over 8,000 older adults this past year.

The Chicago Fitness Plus Program is comprised of two components. The first component consists of fully equipped fitness centers, located in five of the six CDoA Regional Senior Centers. Each fitness center is equipped with senior-friendly strength and cardiovascular training equipment, as well as free weights, balance and flexibility tools. A certified personal trainer, who provides fitness assessment, supervision, individual instruction, feedback and ongoing motivation to participants to encourage program adherence, staffs each fitness center. Group exercise classes are conducted on a regular basis as well. In addition, the CDoA has opened five Satellite Centers in the past three years, which are smaller senior centers that offer many of the same core programs as their larger Regional counterparts, including mini fitness centers staffed by certified personal trainers and group exercise classes.

The second component of Chicago Fitness Plus encompasses 48 community sites where the CDoA provides a certified fitness instructor to teach senior friendly exercise classes each week. Classes are located throughout the city in churches, senior housing, and congregate dining sites, in neighborhoods where low and fixed income seniors live. This ensures a high level of accessibility to the program. Classes are sensitive to seniors with special needs, adapting to disabilities, impairments, and various fitness and functional abilities.

The City of Chicago has achieved a number of outcomes to date including:

Growth and Utilization:

- A constant 15-20% annual program participant growth rate over the last three years;
- 58 program delivery sites;
- 8300 total program participants;
- 406 exercise classes per month average; and
- 1,037 personal training sessions per month average.

Fitness Outcomes:

- 22% increase in lower extremity muscle strength (over 12 weeks training);
- 36% increase in upper back muscle strength (over 12 weeks training);
- 33% increase in chest muscle strength (over 12 weeks training); and
- 30% increase in biceps femoris muscle strength (associated with low back pain) (over 12 weeks training).

Quality indicators and recognition include:

- Participant Satisfaction Survey results reflect 99% satisfaction with services;
- Expansion of program to five new Satellite sites in last two years, with five more planned in the next 1-3 years;
- “Windy City Workout” senior exercise videos created and aired on two Chicago Municipal Television cable stations twice each day to reach homebound seniors;
- Finalist for 2001 Harvard Innovations in American Government Award by JFK School of Government at Harvard University (CFP awarded \$20,000 award); and
- Finalist in 2000 Keiser 50+ Fitness in Aging Award.

The key elements that make this activity or program successful are these success factors:

- Obtaining the commitment to and support of the program by key stakeholders, including the Mayor of the City of Chicago;
- Creating a partnership between the Chicago Department on Aging and a professional fitness management company with experience and expertise in working with seniors, who are able to provide services on a broad scale;
- Delivering a program structure based on scientific research and grounded in behavior modification theory;
- Effectively addressing many of the barriers to physical activity that exist for seniors, including access, affordability, self-efficacy, knowledge and belief in the health benefits of exercise and its positive impact on health; and
- Utilizing fitness professionals that not only possess experience and education regarding senior health, but have a “passion” for working with older adults, and reflect the ethnic diversity of each center’s older adult population.

Many aspects of the CFP Program are adaptable to a variety of organizations, socio-economic and ethnic populations, and physical environments.

The City of Chicago's programs demonstrate innovation through:

- Use of evidence-based wellness model;
- Utilizing a fitness management firm with experience and expertise in senior health;
- Use of a pre-participation health screening protocol and periodic re-assessment;
- Use of senior appropriate fitness programming and fitness equipment;
- Inclusion of health education information and referral to health related resources;
- Marketing the program using input and feedback from seniors;
- Development of home exercise programs in Spanish and Polish; and
- Development of exercise guidelines for chronic health conditions.

The Chicago Fitness Plus program is funded primarily through Title IIIB and IIID of the federal government's Older American's Act. This source of funding has been consistent based on the positive growth rate, outcomes, and participant satisfaction experienced. The CFP Program is free to Chicago residents age 60 years and older. Voluntary annual contributions of \$30 per year are requested of community seniors who participate in the program, although no one is denied service based on ability to donate. Participant donations are used directly within the program to update fitness center equipment.